

Congresswoman Louise Slaughter (NY-28) said that contingency funds available for high heating costs need to be released to help struggling families pay for the rising cost of heating their homes.

“Western New Yorkers are struggling to pay their heating bills and funds exist that can help but aren’t being spent – that’s extraordinary to me,” said Slaughter. “Last year we passed a bill that allows \$590 million to be used for just such a situation. This federal money should be made available, today.”

Last week Slaughter wrote a letter to President Obama asking that \$590 million in contingency funding made available through the Consolidated Appropriations Act be released immediately.

The National Energy Assistance Directors Association has said they expect a 20 percent increase in applications for the Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP) this year. The Erie County Department of Social Services has already reported such an increase.

Of the already allocated LIHEAP funding, here’s what’s been needed in Western New York:

- In Monroe County, more than \$12 million has been allocated to 39,671 households that applied before November. Another \$404,265 in emergency benefits have been given to residents of 998 households.
- In Erie County, the local HUD office reports a 20 percent increase in requests from last year for emergency benefits just in the months of November and December. In 2009, \$28.7 million has been given to more than 81,000 households with 9,000 households receiving emergency funds.
- In Niagara County, almost \$5.5 million has been distributed to 15,241 households in the past 3 months. This is particularly high given that the entire 2008-2009 season gave benefits to 17,287 people. Niagara County has also already allocated \$201,315 in emergency benefits.
- In Orleans County, 2,719 households have received more than \$1.3 million. 245 have already received \$44,000 in emergency funding to avoid having their utilities turned off.

LIHEAP funds are available to residents based on gross monthly household income, household size and living guidelines. Each household's benefit is determined by the amount of household income and vulnerable population classifications. For more information on eligibility for LIHEAP visit: <http://www.otda.state.ny.us/main/heap/default.asp>

LIHEAP is a federally funded assistance program designed to help eligible households with the

costs of heating their homes and is administered locally by the Departments of Social and Senior Services.

A copy of the letter to the President is below:

President Barack Obama
The White House
Washington, D.C. 20500

Dear Mr. President:

We write to thank you for your support of Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP) aid to low-income families and urge you to release the contingency resources as soon as possible to address the needs of families and seniors who are struggling in the current economic crisis. The recently-passed Consolidated Appropriations Act includes \$5.1 billion for LIHEAP—the highest funding level in the history of the program—of which more than \$590 million is dedicated to LIHEAP contingency funding. We urge you to release these resources as soon as possible and we ask that you dedicate sufficient funds for this program in your fiscal year 2011 budget request.

More families are in need of and receiving LIHEAP benefits than ever before. According to the National Energy Assistance Directors Association (NEADA), states assisted more than 8 million households last year, nearly a one-third increase over fiscal year 2008. Furthermore, NEADA anticipates a 20 percent increase in LIHEAP applications this year. Even at the record appropriations levels passed by Congress in the last two years, demand for LIHEAP assistance continues to exceed funding.

The Low-Income Home Energy Assistance Act of 1981 instructs that the LIHEAP contingency fund be used to assist the “needs of one or more States arising from a natural disaster or other emergency.” The law states that economic conditions, such as increased unemployment and layoffs, as well as increased participation in public benefits such as food stamps, merit the release of LIHEAP contingency funds. Clearly these conditions have been met. The most recent USDA food stamp data indicates that a record 37 million people – approximately one in

eight Americans – received food stamps in September. Moreover, many states have experienced unemployment rates that have exceeded the national average for several months. In releasing these funds, we urge you to give consideration to targeting assistance based on economic conditions, as well as extreme weather events.

Releasing emergency LIHEAP funding – supplementing block grant funding already being spent in every state – will help thousands of families and seniors with their energy bills and, in doing so, create a noticeable economic multiplier. Less burdened by energy bills, these low-income families have more to spend on other essentials, and can avoid the choice between paying energy bills and putting food on their table.

Due to the clear economic benefit and demonstrated need, we also urge you to include full funding for LIHEAP in your fiscal year 2011 budget request, the same level that Congress has provided over the last two years.

For many years, LIHEAP has been a vital safety net for low-income families and seniors. In these tough economic times, the program is more important than ever. As such, we respectfully request that you release LIHEAP funding to meet the immediate emergency needs, and we urge you to maintain the federal commitment to low-income energy assistance.

Thank you for your consideration of this important issue.